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Merrill

BY

MARJORIE TALBOT

(G. L. S., '06)

1906

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BOSTON

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To my friend

M. R. W.

this book is affectionately dedicated

Marjorie Talbot

CHAPTER I.

IMAGINE, if you can, a raw, grey day, one of the sort which makes you feel like lolling in front of an open, crackling fire, surrounded by favorite books and wreaths of white smoke from a friendly old pipe, which you peacefully puff at. It was on just such a day that this story opens. The scene is laid on the Southwestern coast of France, not many miles from Cape Breton, where a jolly old inn-keeper has kept an inn for many years for the few and far-between tourists who visit the place. The inn itself, formerly an old chateau, is perched high up on the rocks and commands an uninterrupted view of the blue Atlantic. On this day of early Spring the ocean is not blue; it shares the general dull tone of greyness which sky, rocks and the old, weather-beaten inn possess.

Pierre, the host, stood yawning in front of the great fire in the entrance-hall, and grumbled half-jokingly to his cheerful wife, at the loneliness of the place and scarcity of

guests. Scarcely had he finished his tirade, when suddenly "toot-toot" sounded outside on the hard, rocky road, which had once been a drive-way for the chateau, but was now used as a public way. As automobiles rarely passed the isolated place, owing to the roughness of the road, Pierre forgot his dignity for the moment and rushed to the door, at the same time with his equally corpulent wife. As a result they met in the doorway and stuck there, being able to go neither frontward nor backward for some seconds, until Madame Pierre turning sideways allowed her worthy husband to escape and then followed.

The sight which met their astonished eyes was surely worth all their trouble to obtain it. A large, white automobile was drawn up in front of the inn. In the tonneau were three women, veiled and furred, so that nothing could be seen to give a clue as to their age, or identity. A man, also in furs and goggles, was preparing to assist the ladies from the car, though two of them were laughing so, having seen the collision of Pierre and Madame, that they could not make up their minds to get out. The third woman,

evidently a maid, had raised her veil and was gazing seaward with stolid countenance, as if it were nothing to her whether they stopped or went on. This much Pierre noticed as he bustled forward, volubly expatiating on the advantages of his inn, compared to any other, and promising most hospitable treatment. The ladies, followed by the maid, finally alighted, and the taller one said to Pierre, "We, my friend, maid, and chauffeur, will spend the remainder of the day and the night with you, if you can promise us good entertainment."

"Yes, yes, madame," Pierre hastily exclaimed, "and your beautiful car, too, it shall go into the stables behind the inn, where once were horses, but now, alas, are none." And having pointed out the way to the haughty chauffeur, Pierre once more turned his attention to his guests. The one who had spoken had not yet raised her veil, but her companion had, and Pierre glanced at her with appreciative eye. She was small, with light, fluffy hair and very dark brown eyes. Her face, while not beautiful, because of rather irregular features, was most attractive. She had a fresh color, all her own,

Pierre noted with satisfaction, and every time she smiled, which was quite frequently, she disclosed very white, even teeth, like pearls. In her dark brown furs she made a charming picture as she looked laughingly up at her taller companion who spoke to her in low tones.

Pierre broke in upon the conversation with an apologetic smile. He had, for a long time in his youth, been a chef to an English nobleman, so he could talk English almost, if not quite, as fluently as the two ladies. "You will enter if you please," smiled Pierre, and held open the door for them while his wife hurried in ahead to look over the larder.

The two ladies at once repaired to the settle before the fire, without removing their wraps further, while the maid stood meekly behind them with her usual vacant look. Pierre, in the meantime, was burning with curiosity to look upon the face of the veiled lady. The few words she had addressed to him were uttered in such sweet yet ringing tones that Pierre thought the possessor of such a voice must indeed be beautiful. Nor was he disappointed. Even as he watched them the one still veiled spoke to the maid,

and the maid in turn asked Pierre to escort them to their rooms. As he was about to lead the way the ladies suddenly took off their outer wraps and gave them to Pierre to dry, for the dampness had covered their coats with little beads of moisture so that they looked as if it had been raining on them. As the taller one removed her veil Pierre looked at her eagerly but was disappointed for the minute. He saw a high-bred, sensitive face, pale as death, and with deep black shadows under the eyes. And sad,—Pierre thought he had never before seen so sad an expression on human countenance.

After disposing of their things Pierre led the way to their chambers, which were on the ground floor. As he was about to leave them after seeing them ensconced in adjoining rooms connected by doors, a sudden impulse moved him. "Does madame desire anything? A cup of cocoa perhaps, to stay the strength until luncheon?" asked Pierre, addressing his queries to the taller lady, whose white face looked still more ghastly because of its frame of raven-black hair. She smiled suddenly on him, showing teeth even more beautiful than her companion's, and looking straight at him

out of wonderful eyes. Pierre gasped as he saw them, and forgot to pay attention to her answer. One cannot blame him. Hew as not the first to, looking into those eyes, forget duty, himself and everything. They were large, seeming greater still because of the circles under them, and at first sight seemed dark brown or black, but they were neither. Have you ever seen a dark purple pansy—almost black? That was the color of her eyes; a velvety purple with a sad expression lurking in their depths, but yet which seemed to denote a hidden sense of humor and gave the impression that they might laugh quite heartily even though the lips were unsmiling. She was smiling with both eyes and lips now as she watched Pierre coming to himself, and wondering how he could have so far forgotten himself as not to hear her orders. He looked shamefacedly at her. "My lady, I beg your pardon, most humbly, but I was thinking of other things. Would you most kindly repeat your commands?" With the smile still in her eyes she said, "Ah, Pierre, you must be more careful of that treacherous mind of yours! My friend, Lady Harvey, desires a cup of coffee. As for me, I think I will

wait until luncheon, which I trust is not far off."

Pierre almost forgot himself again, while listening to her low, yet exquisitely thrilling voice. It reminded Pierre, who was an ardent church-goer, of certain chords on the great organ, which though often heard, always gave him an indescribable sensation, half of pleasure, half of pain. Hastily gathering himself together, he left the room to carry out "my lady's"—as he persisted in calling her—orders.

As soon as he had disappeared, Lady Harvey appeared from the next room, and smiling affectionately at her friend, remarked, "My dear Merrill, I can't for the life of me see what you do to them all! Is it necessarily fatal or do some get over it?" My lady, or Merrill, as she may now be called, laughed outright at the half-earnest, half-joking tone of her friend, and returned, "Surely, Helen, you ought to know if anyone does. Are you not my best friend? As for poor Pierre, I could see that he disapproved of me at first, and out of pique I tried to dazzle him. Perhaps I succeeded—and perhaps not; that's not for me to say.—

But come, dear, tell me about your latest trouble with Jack while I change my clothes, as I see you've very wisely done already."

Merrill was gazing out over the cold, grey ocean, as she spoke, and did not see the look of pain which flitted, for an instant, across Helen's face. They were more like men than women, these two, as regards their friendship. Deep as their affection was for each other, during the ten long years in which they had been close friends, never a caress had passed between them, of an endearing nature. Now Merrill turned from the window, and putting her hands on Helen's shoulders, looked deep into her eyes as if to read every fleeting expression. Helen would have given worlds to fling herself into Merrill's strong, tender arms and pour out her troubles, but she dared not. Convinced though she was of Merrill's affection for her, she still was afraid of offending her by some little impulsive act which Merrill, in her proud strength, would consider weak. So she controlled herself with an effort, and standing there with Merrill's clear eyes upon her, told her pitiful yet common enough story. Merrill of course knew all except the very latest

developments but for your benefit I will briefly go over the main facts.

CHAPTER II.

HELEN MANSFIELD was left an orphan and heiress at the age of eighteen, both mother and father dying within a month of each other of fever, then epidemic in Florida where they were passing the Winter. The guardianship of Helen was entrusted to the only sister of her father, an ambitious, crafty old lady, who wished Helen to marry a title. Helen, though usually possessing quite a will of her own, was so overcome by the death of her parents, that she meekly obeyed her aunt in her wish to take a house in London for a year. There, as was natural, Helen's beauty and wealth quickly brought around a throng of admirers, as many as even her aunt could desire. Helen cared nothing for any of them until she met "Lord Jack", as his many friends called John Reginald Montfort Harvey, twelfth earl of Strafford. Helen was instantly attracted to him and he to her—partly for her wealth, but mostly, I'll do him the justice to say, through an ardent but fickle love. Helen only knew that

she loved him and he loved her. She thought nothing of the future, and so, when he humbly asked her to be his wife, she joyfully accepted. He was devoted to her for about a year, and then she discovered his true character. "Lord Jack" was not intentionally vicious, but when a man is young, extraordinarily handsome, rich, and an heir to an old and honored title, he must be popular. He was spoiled—that was the whole amount of it, and when Helen was once his, he began to sigh for new worlds to conquer. He became infatuated with a certain chorus girl at the Gaiety Theatre, and Helen saw him seldom. Then he got over that and fell deeply in love with one of his beautiful tenants, who for some time resisted his advances, but in the end succumbed. After that he went from one affair to another, always smiling, jesting and handsome. In the meantime a son had come to Helen, who loved him passionately, as the image of "Lord Jack," but little Jack, too, was taken away through death. In deepest sorrow Helen secluded herself in one of her country houses, and for a time refused to see anyone.

Through all her love for "Lord Jack" had not once faltered, and she constantly hoped for his repentance and return. Just at this time a neighboring lord and lady gave a large house party, in honor of the great American actress who was then playing in London. Merrill Marlowe was then in her twenty-fourth year—and recognized everywhere as the greatest American actress of the day. She had been born in Ireland but with her parents, who had since died, she moved to America at an early age, and always claimed the United States as her home. Something about Helen interested her at once and they soon became close friends. During the next ten years they constantly corresponded, and were together whenever it was possible. During that time, Helen, only too glad of a confidante, told Merrill, unreservedly, all her troubles. So Merrill, although she had never seen "Lord Jack", had learned all Helen could tell her about him and despised him from the bottom of her heart. As Merrill had been steadily mounting in her career, she had had little time for even her close friends.

At the time this story begins Merrill was in her thirty-fourth year, and had a world-wide

reputation for her wonderful acting—and pure, noble character. Never had the slightest suspicion of stain rested upon her name, and she had more temptations in a year than ten average women have in a lifetime. She had been working beyond even her superb strength and now was seeking rest, after ruthlessly cancelling all Spring engagements with her agonized manager. A cable to Helen notified her and in Merrill's great white automobile, almost as well known as she herself, they set out to find rest and health for Merrill, and forgetfulness, if possible, for Helen. They had toured Northern France, but everywhere Merrill was recognized and lionized, so at last, in sheer despair, they sought out-of-the-way places, such as the old grey inn. At the hotel in which they had passed the night, a letter was handed to Helen just as she was starting out. It was from "Lord Jack" whom Helen had neither seen nor heard from for over a year. Her first impulse was to press it to her lips, her second, to tear it up without reading, and her third and last, to read it calmly and dispassionately in Merrill's presence and act altogether on her advice.

CHAPTER III.

WITH Merrill's loving, sincere eyes resting on her face, Helen briefly explained how she had received the letter, and that she wanted to read it aloud to Merrill. Merrill started to object, as it hurt her terribly to witness the suffering of her friend, for she feared the letter would only contain news of more scandals participated in by "Lord Jack." Helen looked so excited about it though that Merrill could not bear to disappoint her, and steeled herself to listen.

"Helen dearest," it ran, "If you still have any love for a heart-broken, wretched man, come to me, sweetheart. I have realized at last the wrong I have done you and now realize only too fully that I have never really loved anyone but you. I love you. Come to me. JACK."

For a minute after finishing neither woman said a word. Merrill would not, and Helen could not. Then with a little glad cry Helen pressed the letter to her lips again and again. "Merrill, did you hear that? He loves

me! He has always loved me! Ah, Jack, I knew you would be sorry some day. I cannot wait to get to you dear heart!" Merrill tried to sympathize with her as fully as she had always done before, but somehow, she couldn't. "I am very happy for you dear," she said, and then returned to her window with an odd lump in her throat, and a moisture in her eyes which made her shake her head angrily. Helen's voice aroused her: "This means the giving up of our trip, but you don't mind, do you, Merrill? Jack needs me so much, every word of his letter shows that—I must go to him. Merrill!" she suddenly cried with swift suspicion, "Why are you so silent? Do you think I am weak to forgive him so easily? Oh, Merrill! don't despise me. I love him so!"

Merrill turned quickly, and for the first time caught Helen in her arms and pulled her down beside her on the window seat. "Think badly of you, Helen? Is that the way you trust my love? I care more for you than ever before, dear girl, and if you can only be happy now, I shall ask nothing better. I was silent because—will you forgive me for saying it?" Helen pressed Merrill's hand

which had been caressing her hair, to her lips, "Say anything you like, Merrill. Next to Jack I care more for you than anyone in the world. What is it? Tell me!"

"Well," said Merrill, much touched, "I was afraid for you; I was afraid perhaps that Jack's letter is not as sincere as it seems. I've no doubt," she added hastily, as Helen moved suddenly in her arms, "that he means it all now, but I've seen a great deal of life, dear, and men, especially of the stamp I judge 'Lord Jack' to be, are proverbially fickle. But I won't say any more about it You know how sincerely I hope that his reformation is complete. I care only for your happiness, Helen."

The look of sadness deepened in Merrill's eyes as she held the slight form of Helen close to her and gently kissed her hair. There was silence for a time and then Merrill began again: "I have never spoken to you about my life off the stage, Helen. I'm not demonstrative as you know. I tell you now that you may believe me absolutely when I say I care only for your happiness. You think I have many friends. Helen, I have not. There is a no more lonely woman on earth

than I. Of course I have acquaintances—thousands of them, but I care nothing for them, nor they for me."

Helen put her hand over Merrill's mouth, "Don't say that Merrill, you know it's not true. There is not a man, woman or child who ever knew you, who does not love you, and not because you are so famous either," she added, hastily, as she guessed what Merrill was about to say. "You may not care for them Merrill, but they worship you, one and all. Tell me, Merrill, how many men have told you they loved you?" Merrill rose suddenly, almost upsetting Helen. "Don't be foolish, Helen, that has nothing to do with the question! The point is that I have just as much love as any woman to bestow. You are truly the only human being I care for. So you see, dear, what I mean."

A rap suddenly sounded on the door and Pierre, who in his haste to tell his wife about "my lady's" eyes had entirely forgotten the coffee for Helen, announced luncheon. Helen and Merrill came to themselves with a start. Then Merrill turned to Pierre with a regal manner. "Serve luncheon here, Pierre. Lady Harvey has been suddenly

summoned away and we wish to save time. Also order the automobile to be here in half an hour, to take Lady Harvey to Calais." Helen looked up in surprise, but Merrill silenced her with a look and continued, "I shall remain here for some time with my maid if you can accommodate me. That is all."

Pierre had scarcely turned when Helen exclaimed, "I will not leave you in this place without even means for getting away. Come with me, part way at least." "No, " replied Merrill firmly, "this is the most restful place I've yet found, and I intend to stay as long as I can stand it. I shall have Babette for company if Pierre and Co. bore me. Now don't say anything more! You must take the machine. It will get you to Calais quicker than any railroad. Now that is all planned, so let us eat our attractive-looking luncheon. This is the first time in months I have had an appetite! Another inducement to stay, you see," and laughing gaily, though she watched Helen with anxious eyes, Merrill began to pour out the chocolate.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning, the first of May, dawned brightly enough. Gone was all the dullness of sea and sky. Only the old grey inn remained to show how dreary the place might look if it tried.

Merrill, half repenting of her determination to remain at the inn, listlessly drank her morning chocolate which grim-faced Babette had brought her in bed. Suddenly the consciousness of a new feeling in the air broke in upon her, and she hastily rose and dressed, scorning all assistance from Babette except for her hair. This, deep black, like her long lashes, hung in thick folds below her waist. Merrill certainly made a beautiful picture as she stood gazing eagerly from the open window upon the deep blue sea and little white sails dotting it in the distance. If it had not been for her deathly pallor she would have been perfect. Her eyes, shining with life, gave promise of the ardent temperament within, and lighted up her whole face. Babette waited patiently until Merrill drew

away from the window with a half sigh. "Ah, Babette, it it not glorious? Everything seems happy, even the sea. But you, you are always solemn and severe. I cannot see how you ever came to be named Babette. That name should be given to some joyous, irresponsible girl, not to you." Merrill said this laughingly, as Babette brushed her long hair and gazed affectionately at the top of Merrill's unconscious head. They understood each other, these two. It was Babette who, when Merrill fainted in her dressing room, night after night, following some act which kept her under an enormous strain, attended to her and at her wish kept her break-down concealed from everyone until Merrill herself was finally obliged to give up. How much Babette loved her, Merrill never knew; she would have been deeply touched if she had, but Babette concealed her affection beneath her stolid exterior and Merrill never guessed.

"Are not those rocks majestic?" Merrill went on, "If we have any more days as warm as this I shall see if I have forgotten my old art of swimming." Babette gave a start of horror at the very suggestion, but Merrill

paid no attention beyond a slight shrug of her broad, beautifully shaped shoulders.

"Tell me, Babette, have I a bathing suit and cap among my numerous articles of apparel? You know I told you never to let me go anywhere without them."

"Nor have I this time," grumbling said Babette, "but for Heaven's sake and your own, Miss Merrill, don't go near that icy water! Ugh! It makes me shiver even to look at it," and Babette, having eased her feelings, thrust the last hair-pin into place and handed Merrill a small, silver-mounted mirror.

Merrill took the mirror carelessly and dropped it into her lap without looking at it. Her thoughts were now far off, on the way to England, with Helen. "Poor child," she murmured, half aloud, "it is not right for her to have suffered so, and yet how sweet and hopeful she is after so many disappointments, and how much she cares for "Lord Jack."

Babette, seeing that Merrill was in one of her moods, as Babette inwardly termed them, quietly left the room. Merrill rose and went back to the window. Sinking on her knees

by it she rested her elbows on the sill and her chin on her hands. A hard look, almost cruel, came into those wonderful eyes. "If 'Lord Jack' deceives Helen this time and once more destroys her trust in him, I'll—I'll kill him!" Then Merrill laughed suddenly as she realized how tragic she had become. But try as she would, her thoughts could not turn from Helen, and after vainly trying to admire the steep, rugged rocks leading down to the water, she gave up all pretence. "I wish," she thought, reflectively, "that I could meet 'Lord Jack.' What wouldn't I give to bring that cowardly trifler in hearts to my feet, and then leave him heart-broken, as he has done to so many!"

Happily, Merrill's plans along this vindictive line were interrupted. A knock sounded on the door and before Merrill could give permission to the visitor to enter, Pierre bounced in. "Oh, my lady, but you must not, you must not! It is so perilous! No one has attempted it for years, not since my two nephews died. Ah, I beg of you, my lady! Do not do it!" Pierre stopped for breath, and Merrill looked at him in astonishment. Her first thought was that he had

suddenly gone crazy, and she decided to humor him.

"Yes, I see," she remarked in an unconcerned tone, "it was very careless of me to even think of such a thing. And your two nephews, how long ago did they die, and of what disease?" Merrill seemed the personification of polite interest, as, still kneeling by the window with hands tightly clenched to restrain her mad desire to laugh, she turned to speak to him.

Pierre's astonishment equalled her own. "Of what did they die, my lady? Why, I but now said! Jean, the younger, through a crazy spirit of adventure dived from that rock—you may see it there, my lady, the highest of all at the water's edge. The water is deep, very deep, but where he struck was another rock, just covered at high tide. Jean hit his head and slipped into the deep water. His body was never found. His brother Pierre, a beautiful lad when a child and named after me, his uncle, dove bravely in after Jean. He also struck the treacherous rock and was killed. His body was found and given decent burial, but Jean—we never saw him again." Poor Pierre's

voice broke pitifully, and he flourished a large silk handkerchief for a minute. Merrill understood now what he had meant and raged inwardly at having treated the deaths of his nephews so lightly.

"I am sorry, Pierre," she said, gently, rising from the window and standing in front of him, "I did not at first understand you. How old were the children?"

"They were not children then," said Pierre, "but grown men both, and strong swimmers. Pierre was twenty-three, and Jean some less. Now you will not bathe there, my lady?"

Merrill laughed shortly and took a deep breath. How good it would be swimming out there in the blue breakers, rising high up and then falling deep into the trough of the next. Merrill almost forgot Pierre at the thought. Before she had been obliged to give her time so exclusively to the stage, Merrill had spent all of her leisure hours out of doors. Always an ardent lover of every kind of invigorating sport, horse-back riding and swimming had been her favorites. Lately these pleasures had been strangers to her, and the mere thought of being there in the blue ocean, alone, depending only on herself,

made a faint color rise to her cheeks, and she looked like a goddess standing there in her proud strength. Pierre looked at her with awe. Never had he seen anything so absolutely beautiful. If his thoughts could have found words he would have described her as majestic, yet tender; sad, yet strangely happy, and taken altogether, a woman who was made for men to adore and desire.

"Pierre," said Merrill earnestly, "you can trust me to take care of myself. If we have three more days as warm as this to heat the water, I shall start in on my swims. Otherwise, not. And remember this," she added, more sternly, "I am not used to and will not endure any interference. That is all I think." And Pierre went dejectedly out fearing that he had offended "my lady."

CHAPTER V.

In the meantime Helen journeyed to England and arrived in London two days after starting. From Calais she had sent a telegram to "Lord Jack," brief but convincing. "I am coming, Helen," was all she said, but it was enough. As she stepped from the train two strong arms caught her and held her close for an instant. As "Lord Jack" released her, Helen looked almost fearfully into his face, fearing to see some, she knew not what, great change. But he was the same as ever in regard to outward appearance. He was a strikingly handsome man. Not handsome in an effeminate way, but almost excessively manly. Dark grey eyes set in a strong smooth-shaven face, looked frankly out upon the world which had been so kind to him. His lower jaw had no hint of the weakness about it which one would expect to find. Immense in stature, six feet, three, he was correspondingly built, and seemed an ideal, healthy, honorable Englishman. It seemed incredible that this could be the man

who had all but broken Helen's heart, dragged his hitherto unsmirched, honored name into deepest mire, and was the beau ideal of all the young rakes and profligates among the nobles. His months and years of debauchery had left no shadows on his high, open forehead. Except for the weariness in his eyes and the cynical twist of his rather full lips, Helen would have almost believed the past all a dream.

No word was spoken as he led her to the carriage and assisted her to enter. As soon as they were within and the liveried footman had closed the door with a bang, "Lord Jack" slipped his arm around Helen's waist and drew her close. Outside was the din of horses and carriages, but inside was perfect quietness and peace. Helen did not attempt to resist. All her love and adoration of the man came back with triple force. Now her head was on his broad breast and her small hand in his large, strong one. Still not a word was said. When the carriage drew up before the house, "Lord Jack" quickly gathered Helen up in his arms and lifted her out, without her having to touch the step. He did not put her down as he reached the

sidewalk, but still held her as he strode up the broad steps and into the great reception hall, where all the servants were gathered. There he gently set her on her feet on the floor. Then, "Welcome home, my wife," he whispered, and forgetful of the servants their lips met in one long kiss, a kiss of pain, joy, love and reconciliation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next week was the happiest of Helen's life. Lord Jack seemed to have no thought apart from her, as indeed he had not. But it was not in the nature of the man to enjoy life under such peaceful circumstances. He had been sincere—as sincere as it was possible for him in his degraded moral condition to be—but he could not help wishing for the unattainable. When Helen was away from him with Merrill, almost heart-broken because of his acts, a sudden desire had come to him to test his power over her, to see if she loved him as she formerly had. Although he had never seen Merrill,—his taste ran rather to chorus girls and prima donnas than to the world's greatest tragic actress—he became fiercely jealous of her. "What right has she," he demanded, to himself "to keep Helen with her and interfere between husband and wife? Helen is mine and promised to always be so. I will show this actress, this Merrill Marlowe, how little Helen cares for her compared with me!" So "Lord Jack" had

started out with this idea in view and had finally so worked upon himself that he really believed he loved Helen, and had repented of the wrongs he had done her.

Now that Helen was his again, he longed for new worlds to conquer. "Lord Jack" might have been a great man, great in the sense of powerful and famous. If he had lived in other circumstances he could have been an Alexander the Great or a Caesar. As it was, his remarkable talents were rapidly going to waste, his ambition bounded by petty jealousy and desire for revenge for fancied wrongs, and his personal courage daring to rashness, led him from one trouble to another. Helen could not hold him long, she had not the power. No woman he had yet met had been able to really arouse his better nature. The fact that he internally, at least, was as corrupt as ever, showed that he had never truly loved. For it needed just that to bring out the few good qualities which he still possessed.

During the week in which "Lord Jack" had been so devoted to Helen, she had told him much about Merrill; how beautiful she was, what a loyal friend, and how, though she

continually had riches and titles of every sort at her feet, she refused them all, because she could not give her love too. Then, laughing gaily, Helen told him how Merrill had doubted his sincerity at first, and feared to let Helen go to him. Now "Lord Jack," once more tired of Helen, remembered all this and a wicked look came into his grey eyes with their curly black lashes, longer even than Helen's. But would the scheme work? By dexterous questioning he learned all about Merrill that unconscious Helen could tell him, and he soon had his plans laid. Absolutely without conscience, he had no scruples about leaving Helen again. The servants might talk but he cared nothing for them, and as he and Helen had not gone at all into society as yet, his absence would not be noted publicly.

Helen had no time to prepare for the blow. Lord Jack was no procrastinator. On the fateful morning he was as considerate and seemingly devoted as ever. After a late breakfast he set out, for the club, he said, but when he had not come home either to luncheon or dinner, Helen began to fear the truth. She fought against the idea as long

as she could, but to little avail, and a telegram coming late in the evening confirmed her fears. The words seemed to stand out in letters of flame before her dazed eyes, "Have gone for good this time. No use looking for me. Jack." Helen gave a little moan and then sank down with a broken heart onto the couch, before which only the evening before, Jack had knelt, kissing her hands and whispering tender words to her. What was the matter with her? She could not think of anything! What was that name now? Ah, yes, Merrill, Merrill—Merrill.

CHAPTER VII.

DURING this time Merrill had been enjoying herself in her own way. The much-desired three warm days had come, followed by three more, and Merrill recklessly kept her promise. What mattered it to her that her name was on everyone's lips who had ever heard of her, and that her agonized manager was searching high and low for her?

The time, even though only a few days, of absolute rest had done wonders for her. In spite of the combined prayers of Pierre, Madame and Babette, Merrill in her blue bathing suit and cap to match, had cautiously clambered down the dizzy rocks to the water and after carefully examining that particular spot for hidden rocks, she dove lightly in. It was cold—more than that, icy, but Merrill had a strain of obstinacy in her character which caused her to call up to the fearful trio, through chattering teeth, "You three old babies, ought to come in. The water is just cool enough to be exhilarating." Merrill dared not say more lest the chattering

of her teeth betray her, but taking long, even breaths and strokes to match, she raced herself straight out to sea for a quarter of a mile, and then tired, but warm and contented, she turned over and floated, idly counting the white clouds skimming overhead. When she was sufficiently rested, she started back for the shore, now swimming and now floating, as the mood seized her. She found the three mourners, as she laughingly called them to herself, in a state of collapse because of her long swim and stay in the water. Merrill laughed away their fears and lightly ran to her room, where, after a brisk rub-down, she instantly demanded luncheon.

Although Babette shook her head over Merrill's rashness, she rejoiced in her renewed color, elasticity and last but not least, her disgraceful (as Merrill called it), appetite. It seemed as if nothing could satisfy Merrill's energetic longings. After luncheon in her room, she went into the entrance-hall, where Pierre, as usual, was standing in front of a roaring fire. Natural heat seemed to make no impression on him. No matter how warm the day, Pierre always desired a fire and was unhappy without one. Going up behind him

Merrill viewed with quiet amusement his round form encompassed by a large white apron, and his pinky, round bald head. Merrill was tall for a woman, taller in fact than most men, so she looked down at Pierre and could get a good view of his shiny head. Pierre had not heard her come in, but he felt her gaze, and suddenly turned in deep embarrassment:

"You wish something, my lady? Did not the luncheon suit you or are you dying from the cold water and desirous of a doctor?"

"Neither the second nor the third, my Pierre," said Merrill, as she revealed her white, even teeth like rows of pearls, in a dazzling smile, "but I do want something. Will you obtain it for me?"

"My lady knows I will do any possible thing for her," said Pierre, rashly, for he had hardly finished when Merrill broke in:

"I knew you would get it for me, Pierre. I'll tell you. It's a horse!"

Pierre looked at her in horror. A horse! Of all the things in heaven and earth, why did she pick out the one thing impossible to procure? "My lady, it is impossible," he said simply.

Merrill looked keenly at him for a second. Then seeing that he was in earnest, she became earnest too. "I suppose it will be rather hard to get but I am willing to pay any amount to get a good one, not too meek and well-trained." Here Merrill smiled to herself at some amusing recollections of horses in the past, "not too meek and well-trained." Pierre pensively watched the fire, then, "I will get it," he said. "When do you desire it?"

Merrill answered promptly, "Tomorrow."

With equal promptness Pierre answered, "You shall have it," and then he bustled out to start off on his quest. Merrill looked thoughtfully at one of the great andirons. "Dear Helen," she whispered, "I wish I were sure you are perfectly happy."

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER beautiful warm week passed. Merrill's only anxiety was that she had not heard from Helen. Merrill strove to console herself with the old proverb, "No news is good news," and the conviction that Helen would turn to her in trouble sooner than anyone else. But in spite of herself a premonition of evil would not leave her, but hung over her, deepening every day.

Pierre had obtained the horse for her, a beautiful but unruly animal, and wholly unused to the saddle. As Merrill rode cross-saddle she had not much trouble in procuring an outfit for the horse, and in her black skirt, plain white shirt-waist and a dark purple tie to match her eyes, she soon became a familiar sight to the few appreciative peasants who dwelt around. She never missed a day from either her swim or ride and even calm Babette became imbued in part with Merrill's excitement. Never before had Merrill looked so beautiful, and her purple eyes showing now only laughter and love of life

in their depths, and her white teeth, revealed almost always now in a continual smile, caused Pierre to wonder more and more who she was in the great world, and why she seemed so content in this dull little spot. If he had known her full name, he would have recognized her at once, for even in this remote little corner of the world her fame had penetrated. But as Babette always called her "Miss Merrill," and Pierre himself, "my lady," her last name never had occasion to be used, and Pierre thought "Merrill" to be it.

Pierre had worshipped Merrill since she first smiled on him, but as a remote, very superior being, who had nothing to do with affairs of common mortals. But since her spirited fight with "Lord Jack II." as she had mischievously named her horse, his worship had become more personal. If Madame had guessed Pierre's state of mind, Pierre would have had a hard time, but knowing as she did the wide chasm between the rich, beautiful Miss Merrill and the roly-poly, bald, old Pierre, she never suspected that he cared more for Merrill than a distant adoration which Madame herself felt for her.

Merrill's first ride on "Lord Jack II." had indeed been a memorable one. Jacky, as Merrill called him for short, was not bad-tempered, only unused to a saddle, and full of life. Merrill could not give a spring and alight firmly in the saddle as she had done in her more youthful days; much to her disgust, she had to stand on a chair and from that vantage-point climb onto Jacky's back. That animal stood perfectly still until Merrill was in place and the chair removed. Then without any warning he suddenly started and bolted straight down the road for a ways, turned off into a field, still at a mad gallop, and unconsciously answering the pressure of Merrill's fearless fingers on the reins, galloped swiftly back to the inn through the fields and in a few moments was at his starting place. Jacky was surprised. How had he come back here? He did not remember turning back, and, angry because of being so easily fooled, off he started again before anxious Pierre could rush to hold him. Merrill did not attempt to turn him this time. She understood horses and knew he would not give in until he had been conquered in a fair, above-board manner, and not by any

trickery. She sat easily in her saddle admiring the long, even jumps Jacky was taking. Her former skill and confidence had all returned and she was thoroughly enjoying herself. On and on went Jacky. Would he never tire? Fortunately they were now on a wide, level road at the end of which appeared a dark forest of pines. Merrill suddenly recollected that she knew nothing of the way, and once in the forest, might have some trouble in getting out Tentatively she lowered her hands and tightened the reins. Jacky slackened his pace and in a moment fell into a walk. They must have come fifteen miles, and he was only too glad to yield—for the time, since he could do it without loss of dignity. Merrill stroked his black, smooth neck encouragingly: "Good old Jacky, you are a sraightforward foe at least! There are no mean tricks of rearing and shying about you." Before the words were fairly out of her mouth, Jacky had recovered his breath and his obstinacy with it. Suddenly he reared up, up until he stood perfectly straight. Merrill's surprise did not prevent her from recalling former similar experiences. She dropped the reins on his

neck and threw herself forward on the reins. For an instant they, the woman and the horse, like one mass, wavered, and then human intelligence conquered brute cunning, and Jacky dropped back to his normal position. From that time he tried no more tricks, and he and Merrill became close friends.

If Merrill had heard from Helen that she was perfectly happy, Merrill would have been absolutely contented. She did not even want Helen to be with her, for Helen cared nothing for out-door sports, except automobiling, and Merrill, in her new character, considered that distinctly lazy. Since the return of her machine from Calais, she had not once thought of it.

Another day, like midsummer, came. As usual, Merrill prepared to carry out her regular program. This was as follows: She rose late, about twelve, and combined luncheon and breakfast. After that varied meal she withdrew to her room where she wrote for an hour in her very elaborate diary. She hated diaries, but several publishers had pressed her again and again to write her autobiography, and she had finally agreed, as a sop to Cerbeurs, to keep a minute diary

for a time and then hand it over to the eager publishers to use as they would. Needless to say she put nothing of her real life, hopes and feelings in it. It was written for just what it was to be, a public document open to everybody. After her writing for the day was concluded, Merrill would put on her riding skirt and usual costume and go for a long ride. On her return she took a swim, much to the horror of Madame, who prophesied pneumonia, cramps and sudden death.

On this particular day Merrill arose with a strange feeling of exultation. She felt like laughing, then like weeping, and yet like not doing either. Just as she, already mounted, was setting out for a brisk gallop, Pierre rushed from the door with a newspaper in his hand. Merrill looked at it curiously; it was the first she had seen since her arrival. "My lady, at last, at last I know who you are! Ah! how blind I was not to have guessed. See!" and Pierre held up the paper before her wondering eyes. There in big headlines was her name, and underneath, a picture of her, better than the ordinary newspaper cuts.

Merrill bit her lip angrily that this hateful publicity had followed her even here, and

hastily read the opening lines. It was a graphic account, doing full justice to the author's imagination. The pith of it was, that Merrill Marlowe, the great actress, had disappeared absolutely from the face of the earth. No trace could be found of her anywhere, and her manager and many friends were in despair, fearing that owing to her ill-health she had been driven to suicide. Here Merrill laughed, "Good old Helen," she murmured, "you would not give me away, would you?" and turning to Pierre, Merrill said sternly, "I want to remain hidden for a time, do you understand?"

"Yes, my lady," said Pierre humbly, and watched her canter over the brow of the hill, with a strange pain at his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

On one of her former rides Merrill had noticed a small by-path hung over with newly-green trees and giving an alluring picture of rustic beauty. She determined to ride through here to-day and see where, if anywhere, it lead. The better to enjoy the scene she calmed Jacky into a walk and they went slowly along, Merrill's eyes now gazing with quick appreciation at some especially beautiful picture, and now her mind far off with Helen. Suddenly Jacky shied violently almost throwing Merrill, who looked at once for the cause. There on the right of the narrow road, under an old oak, a man was lying asleep. It could be seen at first glance that he was not a peasant. His grey flannels covered an almost perfect figure. He was strongly built with broad shoulders and a fine, straight back. Merrill could see only this as he lay half on his side, his well-formed, close-cropped head pillowed on his arm and his other strong, white hand clutching a clump of grass.

"Who can he be?" Merrill wondered, and forced Jacky up to him to have a closer look. Then she noticed the beauty of his face and unconsciously hoped that his eyes and teeth would not spoil the effect. He had wonderful lashes for a man, she observed, long and curly, of the same dark brown hue as his hair. Suddenly he stirred, and before she could get Jacky into motion he opened his eyes and looked up into her face. Even in her embarrassment she noticed his eyes and inwardly gave thanks. They completed the face, gave a humorous expression to what otherwise might have been stern. For an instant they looked at each other and then he raised his hand to his head, evidently feeling for his cap.

"It is there behind you," said Merrill, and then blushed furiously, hating herself for the whole proceeding. Still with his eyes on hers the man arose and stood by Jacky's head.

"I hope I did not frighten you," he said, slightly smiling.

"No, not at all! I mean, yes, you did—that is you frightened the horse and I was investigating the cause of his fear when you awoke," said Merrill incoherently. What

was the matter with her? She had known many men of every sort and character, but none had ever affected her like this. She hastily controlled herself.

"Now that I am properly punished for being so curious, I shall start on again," she said lightly, and giving Jacky a slight kick she was off down the road before he could say another word. "Lord Jack," for it was he, swore softly to himself and then remarked aloud: "By Jove, what a woman, I must know her better."

Then picking up his abused grey cap he set off in the direction of the inn. He had already walked ten miles but he thoroughly enjoyed it, and strode along now as easily and lightly as if he had just started. His thoughts were with Merrill and he did not notice a round stone right in his way. He stepped on it and it rolled out from under his foot giving his right ankle a cruel wrench. With an exclamation of pain he went down on his knees. For several minutes, dizzy with the pain he did not try to rise, and rested on his side in the dusty road. Then, setting his teeth grimly he rose and limped down the road.

* * * * * * *

In the meantime, Merrill, riding at full speed, tried to rid herself of the curious feeling which had come over her, but she did not succeed very well. "How tall he was and handsome!" she found herself exclaiming, and then blushed again. "I will not think of him again," and to prove that she wouldn't, she began to recite Juliet's balcony speech, giving her mind wholly to it, and, as usual, becoming Juliet herself for the time being. The ride had lost its attraction, and she rode directly back to the inn. Hastily dismounting, she left Jacky to Pierre and hurried up stairs to make a lightning change into her bathing suit. Then, disregarding the expostulations of Babette, who felt called upon to begin the fight anew each day, she ran lightly down to the old grey rocks, which she considered her especial property, and dove quickly over into the water. The day had been almost too warm and the water felt grateful to her warm body. As she rose to the surface she set out with long, even strokes, now breast, and now side, as she turned to wave gaily to her ever-frightened trio, who were peering over the rock at her. Every day the same thing happened, the bodyguard

of three marched solemnly down to the rocks after Merrill and watched her every instant until she was on dry land again. Merrill swam straight out to sea, on and on, seeming never to get enough of the cool, smooth motion. Behind her a huge, black cloud was rising and it seemed to pursue her as she swam on in blissful unconsciousness. Gradually it overtook her and passed beyond. Then for the first time Merrill became aware of how dark it was growing. In an instant she realized what had happened, and turned towards the shore, which seemed miles and miles away. In reality it was only about half a mile but it had become so dark that she could scarcely distinguish it. The waves increased each moment and for the first time Merrill felt the power of the strong undercurrent about which Pierre had often warned her. She had never come out so far before so had not realized the strength of it. For an instant she was panic-stricken and a huge wave, catching her unawares, carried her under. But her natural courage soon returned and she struck out bravely for the fast-disappearing shore. It was raining now in torrents, and it seemed to her as if the

whole world was made up of water. She was swimming mechanically now and had no thought of fear. Instead she found herself wondering if the stranger would feel sorry if he heard of her sad end, and she smiled grimly as she thought of Pierre, Babette and Madame.

Her mood softened as the thought of Helen rose before her and she gave a half unconscious prayer for Helen's happiness. On and on, it seemed to her as if she had been swimming for hours. The rain blew into her eyes, and she could no longer see the shore. Another thought struck her, and even her courage faltered before it. What if she was swimming out to sea instead of towards shore? That would explain the years she had been swimming without result. For surely it had not taken so long for her to swim out. "There is no use of struggling against the Fates," she murmured half aloud, and was about to give up the fight, when all at once a great dark mass rose out of the water before her and with a cry of joy she seized it and clung as if she could never let go. An answering cry came from overhead, and looking wearily up she saw

the three familiar heads peering down at her. Now there were four, and then a familiar figure half fell, half scrambled down the steep rock until he was on a ledge about three feet above where Merrill was clinging. Throwing himself flat on the rock, "Lord Jack" reached down and caught Merrill's wrists. Then, with a superhuman effort, for Merrill hung a dead weight, he lifted her gradually, inch by inch, until she was on the ledge beside him. For the first time he looked into her face.

"You!" he gasped, as Merrill, too weak to move lay on the ledge smiling up at him. He had no time to say more for Pierre arrived at last, having come by a long and roundabout, though infinitely safer way. By this time Merrill had partly recovered.

"If you can each give me an arm I think I can make the inn more or less easily," she said, her observant eyes on "Lord Jack's" face. He was very white around the lips but it never occurred to her that this was due to any other cause than excitement or fear for her. Rising as she spoke, she took Pierre's arm and looked enquiringly at "Lord Jack." With difficulty, suppressing a groan, he got

onto his feet, but when he stepped towards her the much-abused ankle gave way, and he fell right at her feet.

"You are hurt! Why did you not tell me?" cried Merrill, and quite forgetful of herself she knelt beside him and unconsciously caught his hand in hers. He could not speak at first, so deep was his shame. Had he come here to break this woman's heart and ruin her life? Gently withdrawing his hand, he said, "Do not be alarmed! It is nothing. I wrenched my ankle just after leaving you and it will not bear my weight very well now. If you can get along with only Pierre's assistance, I think I can manage myself all right." Merrill blushed hotly as she realized what she had done and turned quickly to Pierre.

"You may help me to my room, Pierre, and then come back for this gentleman. As for you, sir," she added, turning back to "Lord Jack," "you keep perfectly still until Pierre returns to aid you. I know this rain is not especially cheering, but Pierre won't be long, I promise you." And indeed he was not. For as soon as they had reached the summit of the rocks Babette and Madame

met them, and Merrill sent Pierre back at once to "Lord Jack," and went at once to her room where Babette and Madame coddled and petted her to their hearts' content. In a short time Merrill fell asleep and dreamed of grey eyes, now smiling, now dark with pain, and now filled with an inexplicable longing which grieved her, she knew not why.

And "Lord Jack"? As he lay helpless on the rocks, with the cold, relentless rain beating down upon him, he saw himself for the first time as he really was. Not as a gentleman of high passions and warm temperament, but as a cowardly blackguard. Worse than a thief, worse even than a murderer, for the latter killed the mortal body, while "Lord Jack" had sought the soul itself. When, not recognizing his destination, he had reached the inn at the beginning of the storm and terrified Pierre had told him of Merrill far out in the waves, he little thought that Merrill and his "beautiful unknown" were one and the same. His rescue of Merrill only fitted in with the scheme he had formed of winning her confidence and love, and it was a real shock to discover in her the woman

whose face had been haunting him all day. He thought over all this now as he patiently waited for Pierre, and the sight of that worthy coming down the rocks to him put an end for the time to his unpleasant reflections. One thought alone remained. He had come to conquer Merrill—and he loved her!

CHAPTER X.

MERRILL awoke the next morning to find the storm still raging without. Her shock of the preceding day had left her strangely weak and she said to the faithful Babette, half irritably, "Do stop hovering around me in that ghoulish fashion. I shall not get up to-day so you may tell Pierre to send my luncheon here. I will eat it without rising, And, Babette!" she said suddenly, as the maid started for the door, "Do not forget to inquire for the gentleman who was of such service to me yesterday." Babette started for the door once more and was met just outside by Pierre.

"How is my lady?" eagerly asked Pierre. Babette answered him shortly and was about to go on when he detained her. "I have here a note for my lady from the English gentleman. You will give it to her, Babette?"

"Of course, of course," snapped the maid testily at him and catching it from his hand re-entered the room. Merrill disliked exceedingly to be interrupted when she was in

a pleasant revery, and she looked at Babette now with angry eyes.

"Have I not told you I shall not rise. Nothing could persuade me on a day like this! Then why are you back again? Once for all I tell you, I am not going to get up."

Babette stared at her mistress in unconcealed astonishment. She had never before seen her in such a mood. Mutely she held out the note to Merrill. It was written in pencil on a page evidently torn from a notebook, but she cared nothing for that. Eagerly opening it she read the following:

"My Dear Miss Marlowe:

I hope you will excuse this rude conveyance of my most sincere hopes for your speedy recovery. I am glad to say that my ankle is greatly improved, and I can hop around this old hall quite easily.

Sincerely yours,

John Montfort."

So that was his name! "John Montfort!" It sounded like him, Merrill thought, so strong and attractive. Then a sudden impulse seized her; "Babette," she called. The harrassed maid heard her from half-way down the corridor, and hurried back.

"Did you call me, Miss Merrill?" she asked, respectfully. For some unknown reason Merrill seemed once again in a good humor.

"Yes, Babette," said Merrill, laughing in spite of herself at the resigned expression of Babette. "I want you to help me dress. I think it will be more cheerful in the entrance-hall, by that dear old fire, than here alone, with the rain beating so dismally on the panes. Don't you?"

Babette assented readily enough, and in a short time Merrill was ready. She had made Babette dress her hair low on her neck, as she always wore it on horse-back, and it made her look very young. Since she had come to the inn she seemed to have lost a year, for each day she stayed. It seemed incredible that this beautiful young woman had seen thirty-four years. The only sign of her years and exacting profession were the dark circles under her eyes. But even these added to her wonderful beauty and made her purple eyes, glowing with the hidden fire of her high-strung, ardent temperament, contrast strikingly with the dark lashes above and shadows beneath.

She went swiftly down the corridor and into the entrance-hall where, as always, the cheerful fire was crackling. For a minute she stood still in disappointment. No one was in sight. Then a deep sigh sounded from behind the high back of the settle. Merrill glided noiselessly to it and looked down upon the seat. Stretched out at full length on it was "Lord Jack," his injured ankle swathed in bandages and carefully supported by one of Madame's soft, fat cushions.

Feeling Merrill's glance he looked up, straight into her eyes and a strange thrill ran through him. He wished he could kneel at her feet and press the hem of her skirt to his lips. More than this he dared not hope for. He was not worthy. All this and more was expressed in his eyes as he lay looking up at her. Something of what he was thinking suddenly came to Merrill and her heart gave a peculiar throb. How white he looked! She longed to stroke back the thick, brown hair from his broad, white brow, but she restrained herself.

"I have come to thank you, Mr. Montfort, for saving my life yesterday. If it had not been for you—" Here she faltered, for now

those grey eyes, so earnestly fixed on her, reminded her of the dream. They had that look of inexplicable longing which had so grieved her in the dream. She had not thought eyes could look so sad.

"It is very kind of you to take the trouble to thank me," said "Lord Jack" in his deep, musical voice. "I am sorry that I cannot rise and pull a seat for you up to the fire, but to tell the truth, my ankle is not so well off as I made it out to be in my note. It's nothing serious," he added hastily, as he saw her look of alarm. "Pierre says that I got cold in it through the wetting I received yesterday, but I don't believe it's that. I think the five miles I tramped after wrenching it, added somewhat to its weak condition. But I have not yet heard you report on your condition. Did your lengthy stay in the water cause any ill after-effects?"

"Oh no!" said Merrill, calmly tipping up the wood-box and perching herself thereon. "Water is my native element and I am never so much at home as when I am floating around in the ocean—except perhaps," she added reflectively, "when I'm on horseback. Now I suppose you are an expert in

every kind of sport," taking in with appreciative eye, his broad shoulders and magnificent physique.

"Not an expert," put in "Lord Jack" quickly, "only an humble follower of sport in general, but like you devoted to horses and swimming." Here he smiled suddenly at her, showing his strong, white teeth and beautifully curved, almost girlish mouth, which the strong jaw below seemed to contradict. Silence fell, and Merrill could feel his eyes scanning her face. A sudden shyness overcame her, and she rose.

"I almost forgot some writing I have to do. We shall meet again at luncheon. Until then—pleasant thoughts!" and Merrill vanished from view. "Lord Jack" lay in his place with clenched hands.

"Pleasant thoughts," he muttered. "Ah, Merrill, if only I had the right to think of you, just of you!"

CHAPTER XI.

"LORD JACK" passed a sleepless night. A terrific battle was fought between his good and bad spirits. It was all the harder that he had allowed his passions full sway for so long, and had made no attempt to control himself. It was not that he any longer had the idea with which he started out, of deliberately gaining Merrill's love and then laughing at her and leaving her. For the first time in his careless, wayward life, love in its fullest sense had come to him. His wish now was to see Merrill happy, even if it caused his own sorrow. Though the battle was a long and hard one, his better self conquered. He would not speak of his love to her but would go away as soon as his injured ankle would permit, and never cross her path again. It did not occur to "Lord Jack" in his new-found humility that Merrill might care anything for him. His one thought was to shield her from the annoyance his devotion might cause her, and even worse, the stain which would fall on her reputation if it were known that he cared for her.

"Lord Jack" tossed to and fro on his bed, now with clenched hands because of the unendurable pain in his ankle, and now with his grey eyes dark with pain as the realization grew upon him of what leaving Merrill meant.

Merrill was also having a sleepless night, though not as hard a one as "Lord Jack." In all the years of her charming girlhood and beautiful womanhood, Merrill had never thought twice of any man except in a friendly way. Many had loved her and humbly laid their hearts at her feet, but Merrill smiled half sadly upon them all, and steadfastly refused every offer. Until yesterday she had come to believe that she could not love a man. Now this sudden awakening, half sweet, half fearful, almost frightened her. She had not realized what a store of affection she possessed. Helen had never been able to bring out in Merrill this fiery passion, which neither guessed she owned. So, though never guessing "Lord Jack's" identity, Merrill too, tossed to and fro, now hating herself for (as she termed it) being so weak and now smiling happily as she thought of the light she had surprised in his eyes.

Contrary to her usual custom, Merrill rose about nine o'clock. The storm had entirely passed, and only the freshness of the grass and trees remained to show they had been lately invigorated. The sun shone brightly and Merrill felt a thrill of happiness run through her as she hastily dressed—to breakfast with him. She ran lightly down the corridor and appeared in the hall, much to Pierre's astonishment, just as "Lord Jack" wearily lifted a cup of coffee to his lips. Crash! and the coffee, cup and all, fell from "Lord Jack's" hand and splashed all over the white cloth of the table.

"Good morning," said Merrill lightly. "I'm glad you're not always as careless as that, or I would not be here now! Just suppose," she added turning to Pierre, "what would have happened to me if Mr. Montfort had dropped me in that excitable manner yesterday."

"Lord Jack" had with difficulty arisen, while she was talking, and now stood upright, one hand clutching the edge of the table as a support, while he watched with grave eyes. He wondered if she knew his feeling for her. She probably did, he thought half-angrily, for had not Helen often told him that for all

men, old and young, to look on Merrill was to love her. His reflections were interrupted by Merrill:

"Please don't stand, Mr. Montfort, I am very glad your ankle is well enough to permit your doing it, but I am going to sit right down here with you, if I may, and have some breakfast."

"It will give me great pleasure to have you, Miss Marlowe," "Lord Jack" replied slowly. He was rapidly losing control, and Merrill noticed how the veins in his hand stood out. She thought the pain in his ankle was causing it and going swiftly to him, she placed her hands on his shoulders and tried to force him back into the chair. For an instant he resisted and they stood there together. Tall as he was, Merrill almost equalled him, and Pierre, coming back suddenly with fresh coffee, could not help noting what a handsome, well-matched couple they were. Trembling from the touch of Merrill's hands, "Lord Jack" dropped back into the chair, and Merrill, with a little smile, went around to the other side of the table. She was convinced now that he cared for her. Else why had he so trembled under her touch. She guessed

nothing of the deeper reason of his agitation, and as she faced him across the table, was as attractive as possible.

"Lord Jack" put away his feeling of depression and with it his good resolutions. All the brilliancy of the man rose to the surface, and while he kept Merrill thoroughly interested, her sparkling wit, in turn, charmed him more each moment. Breakfast was all too short, and they looked at each other with reluctant eyes as it drew to a close.

"I should imagine the rocks would make a very attractive spot on a day like this," said "Lord Jack" suggestively.

"I've no doubt they would," answered Merrill, all her natural waywardness coming to her aid, "why don't you go down to them and stretch out in the sun? I'm sure it would be most beneficial to your ankle." And with this Merrill ran lightly down the corridor, like a perverse, light-headed girl of eighteen instead of a woman of thirty-four. "Lord Jack" looked after her in pained surprise, and then dragged himself painfully to the open door and out upon the broad, stone steps. Seating himself upon them he gazed moodily out over the sea.

Suddenly Pierre appeared around the corner, leading a handsome black horse wearing a man's saddle. The next instant he heard Merrill behind him, and she came out on the steps with a crop under her arm, and pulling on her gloves as she waited for Pierre and Jacky. She was bare-headed, with her black, thick hair done simply on her neck, to resist the violent efforts of Jacky to pull it down for her.

"What do you think of 'Lord Jack'? Is he not a beautiful animal?" Merrill asked "Lord Jack" with unconscious truth.

"Lord Jack!" he gasped, half rising, and the color leaving his face. "What do you mean? Who—who is 'Lord Jack'?"

Merrill looked at him in surprise, though no suspicion of the truth crossed her mind.

"'Lord Jack' is the name of my horse. I call him Jacky for short," she added, as giving Pierre her foot, she swung lightly into the saddle. She gathered up the reins in her left hand and with her right solemnly saluted "Lord Jack" with her crop. "I beg leave to report that I shall be down on the rocks in two hours and hope for company," said Merrill, in stiff, military tones and cutting

Jacky lightly with her whip she wheeled and cantered quickly over the hill.

CHAPTER XII.

As soon as Merrill was out of sight, "Lord Jack" called Pierre to his aid, and using him as a staff, slowly made his way down to the rocks. There he ensconced himself in a comfortable position and prepared for a long revery, while waiting for Merrill. But he did not have long to wait. The memory of his wistful eyes was with Merrill as she rode. The slowest walk and sharpest canter could not drive it away. "How I wish he was riding along here with me! Wouldn't it be perfect?" cried Merrill, aloud. And then to show that she was only too glad to be alone, she began humming a mournful little song, which was all of the pleasures of solitude and the unstable qualities of love. She could not forget however how his face had fallen when she had so flippantly upset his plans for continuing their conversation, on the rocks. Riding lost its charm, and less than three-quarters of an hour from the time she had set out, she drew up in front of the inn. Forgetting to give the outraged Jacky his sugar,

she hastened to her room to change from her habit into a simple morning dress. The dress was of some white stuff, simply made, but nothing could have been more suited to her unusual beauty. On the dressing table was a bunch of violets, the first of the season, which Babette had gathered for her during her absence. Merrill fastened them into her belt and prepared to go down to the rocks. She had no idea that "Lord Jack" would be there for she was an hour and a quarter early, so she looked from her window without in the least expecting to see him. Her heart gave a sudden leap and a tender look crept into her eyes. He was there waiting for her. And she inwardly registered a vow that he should not regret it. No more precious moments were wasted. Merrill hurried at once down to the rocks, where the look of glad surprise which greeted her was ample payment for her shortened ride.

"It seems an unkind thing to say, I know," observed "Lord Jack" dryly, "but the last two hours were certainly the shortest I ever spent."

Merrill started to snub him, but thought better of it, remembering her resolution. "I hated to think of you here alone with nothing

but a sprained ankle for amusement, and so I cut short my ride," she answered frankly.

"Ah, that explains it!" commented "Lord Jack." "The hour you were gone seemed three, but I knew that it couldn't really be three, for then it would have seemed like nine."

Merrill laughed outright. "I never was good at mathematics and I grow even worse with age, so please do not give me any more concrete compliments. I find it is all I can do to believe the abstract ones."

"Well," announced "Lord Jack" triumphantly, "this is the first time I ever heard a woman admit that she believed a compliment of any kind. Is it that you are an extraordinary woman or I am an extraordinary man?"

"A little of each, perhaps," chaffed Merrill, "you show plainly by that remark that the women of your acquaintance are not as sincere as they might be. Now if I believe a thing to be true, no false qualms of modesty can make me say that I doubt its truth."

"Lord Jack" looked pensively at Merrill beside him. She was leaning back against some convenient rocks, her hands clasped

behind her head, and her graceful form showing to its best advantage. The dark purple violets, matching her eyes, seemed to "Lord Jack" like Merrill herself. He reached over and pulled several from the bunch. Merrill did not move as he fumbled with the violets, trying to find some loose ones, but looked thoughtfully down on the close-cropped, well-shaped head as just for an instant it rested against her. When he had obtained the violets, "Lord Jack" leaned back in his place and regarded them. A deep silence had fallen and neither wished to break it. Merrill watched his strong, well-shaped fingers as they idly picked over the flowers, now bunching them together and then taking them apart, only to collect them again in some new form. It was "Lord Jack" who finally broke the silence.

"In some way these violets remind me of you," he said half-fearfully. The old "Lord Jack" who could give a compliment and a kiss at the same time, and mean neither of them, was forever gone. Now he looked at Merrill but her expression told him nothing, and he went daringly on. "They are so beautiful and pure. Not the mild, inane purity of the

lily, which is pure because it can't be anything else, but with the purity of a passionate character who has been often tempted, but through fierce struggles has kept her purity and after each fight becomes stronger and better, and so I think they are like you.—Do you believe that too?" he suddenly asked her.

Merrill considered a moment. "I cannot judge my own character," she said slowly, "but," she added earnestly, "I know that you are sincere in saying what you have, and I should like very much to believe it myself, as implicitly as you do."

"Lord Jack" stared at her in glad astonishment, but his voice trembled a little as he said, "You just now said that you knew I was sincere. How did you know?"

"I can read your eyes," said Merrill simply.

"Lord Jack" closed them to think. His brain was in a whirl. Now for the first time the idea crossed his mind tha this love might be returned, in part at least. In his brain, tired with vain endeavors to distinguish right from wrong, the old battle was raging. "I was ready to give her up," he argued, fiercely to himself, "when it hurt only myself. But if

—if she does care for me, it's too much to ask. I won't, I won't give her up!"

Something of the struggle he was undergoing showed in his face, as unconsciously he looked appealingly at Merrill. In an instant she moved to him and caught his hot hand in hers. She had acted on impulse thinking him to be in pain, but "Lord Jack" could not bear more. Half sobbing he caught her hand to his lips and held her yielding form close. Taken utterly by surprise Merrill did not attempt to resist, but shyly touched his cheek with her hand. "Merrill, sweetheart!" was all he could say. Bending his head to hers he sought her lips. As he gave Merrill her first kiss, he held her closer, closer yet, and their lips met and clung as if not even death itself could separate these two.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next three weeks were the happiest of Merrill's life. There was still no news from Helen, but Merrill in her new-found happiness scarcely missed it. To "Lord Jack" this love was a revelation. The thought that this proud, beautiful woman loved him beyond everything brought sadness as well as joy. When he was with Merrill and under the charm of her companionship, nothing in the world seemed to matter except that they loved each other passionately. But when he was not with her he saw but too plainly, the difficulties of the situation. He could not marry her and loving her as he did, he would not offer her anything less honorable. Except for this they lived wholly in the present. Much to his relief, Merrill had not made any inquiries about his position in the outer world. When love comes to a woman like Merrill, it comes only once, but then it owns her, heart and soul. It never occurred to her to question "Lord Jack." If her opinion of him could have been analyzed, it would probably have been something like this:

"John Montfort is my ideal of a noble, manly man. His worldly connections? I care nothing for them, for I love him!"

Under the tender touch of love Merrill grew more beautiful daily, and daily "Lord Jack" watched her with the ever-growing pain in his heart. He no longer thought of himself. His only idea was to spare her all pain. The time was long past when his departure would have helped matters. To go away now would only be to hasten the blow. What Merrill would do when she discovered his identity, he dared not think. She had told him about Helen and "Lord Jack" and it hurt him terribly to hear Merrill express so vehemently her hatred and contempt for the erring "Lord Jack." If Helen could only have known it, she was being avenged a thousand times.

"Lord Jack's" injured ankle was now a thing of the past, and he joined Merrill in all her expeditions, both on horseback and into the ocean. The worthy Pierre had managed to obtain a horse for "Lord Jack," and although it was not as good an animal as Merrill's, it did very well for the purpose to which it was put. "Lord Jack" called him Alexander, because,

as he solemnly told Merrill, he always felt like exclaiming after laboriously mounting the high, sharp back, "Are there no other worlds for me to conquer?" She informed him decisively that she did not see the point of the joke at all. But several days afterward he found her laughing at the idea, and so forgave her for the original snub. Merrill had become very fond of Jacky and "Lord Jack" took this fact as a good omen and tried to defend the supposedly absent "Lord Jack" to the best of his ability.

"You admit that you like Jacky in spite of his name," he argued craftily. "Then why can't you give the original "Lord Jack" the benefit of the doubt, and allow that all his qualities may not be tied up in his name?"

"Ah! but you see," Merrill had said in answer, "I have called him Jacky from the very beginning—and plain Jacky is much more like John than like 'Lord Jack'," and Merrill blushed beautifully as "Lord Jack" took her in his strong, loving arms and whispered the familiar tender words in her willing ear.

On this day they had set out for a long ride, but the excessive heat caused them to repent of their plan and start back for home earlier

than they had intended. As Pierre received their horses he whispered something to Merrill, and she turned to "Lord Jack" with a cry of delight.

"John, Helen is here, inside waiting for me. Now I am perfectly happy. Come quickly!" she cried, seizing his hand, "I can not wait to see her!"

"Lord Jack" leaned heavily on Alexander and turned pale as death. It had come at last, as he knew it must. Well, at least he could take it like a man! And unconsciously squaring his shoulders, "Lord Jack" followed Merrill into the hall. Helen sprang to meet her, and for a moment "Lord Jack" was unnoticed while the two women welcomed each other. Helen had aged years in the past weeks. The shock of "Lord Jack's" departure had been too much for her and she had been very ill. All this she was telling Merrill now, when "Lord Jack" interrupted.

"I hope you are wholly recovered now, Helen," he said quietly. Both Merrill and Helen turned in astonishment, Helen at that familiar voice, and Merrill because "Lord Jack" had never mentioned to her his knowing Helen.

For a moment, which seemed a century to him "Lord Jack" and Helen looked at each other. Then Helen took a quick step towards him:

"Jack, what are you doing here? You never told me that you knew Merrill!" Quick suspicion stopped her for an instant. Then she turned to the astounded Merrill: "You—you have deceived me all this time. While I was ill, almost dying, you and my saintly husband were laughing at me, and using my absence to *good* purpose! Merrill, how could I have ever trusted you so! There is nothing more I can say. You are a fit pair —and I hate you, hate you!"

Helen rushed from the hall and left them alone. Merrill's long training as an actress stood her in good stead now. In spite of the shock which had destroyed at one blow her happiness and faith in human nature, Merrill stood there outwardly unmoved, except for her eyes. They would never smile again. "Lord Jack" did not attempt to explain or condone. Taking one stride he threw himself at her feet and raised the hem of her skirt to his lips.

Merrill looked down at him with unutterable sorrow and—yes, unutterable love in

those purple eyes. She had no thought of Helen's mad injustice and insults. She only saw "Lord Jack" at her feet, shaking with great sobs. The sight of this almost shook her composure. Leaning down she lightly kissed his forehead. "God forgive you, 'Lord Jack'!" she said, and left him kneeling there.

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After she had gone, "Lord Jack", with a look of ineffable suffering stamped upon his face, rose and went to his room. A short time after he heard unaccustomed sounds outside. He looked out and saw a large, white automobile just starting. "Lord Jack" threw himself on his bed and buried his face in his hands. "God forgive me!" he murmured.

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